of identifying a block for acquiring the exploration right, it has also started dialogue for partnership with several companies who have the exploration licenses in coal bearing Tete province.

(c) No, it is not necessary to buy coal mines to import coal.

(d) The domestic reserves of metallurgical and low ash thermal coal, which have the techno-commercial viability for extraction, are limited and cannot meet the demand level. Acquiring coal mines/properties abroad will enhance the energy security of the Nation.

Government's plan to permit coal mining by standalone companies

10& SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's plan to permit coal mining by standalone mining companies that have tied up firm supply contracts with power, steel and cement companies to become operational;

(b) whether the Law Ministry has also accorded its nod to the proposal and mining companies having firm supply contracts with approved users can undertake mining coal blocks reserved for captive users even without amending the Coal Mines Act, 1973;

(c) if so, whether any concrete programme or action plan has been prepared by the Ministry in this regard; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (DR. DASARI NARAYAN RAO); (a) to (d) Yes, Sir. The Government after taking into account the legal opinion received from the Learned Attorney General of India, through the Ministry of Law, has decided to allow coal mining by independent mining companies on the condition that the entire mined coal would be transferred to the end use company/companies for the specified end uses. The guidelines for the allocation of coal blocks have been amended accordingly.